

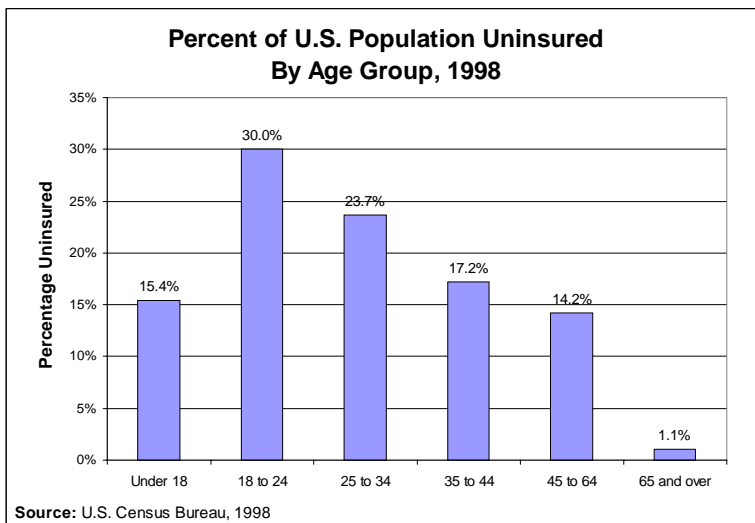
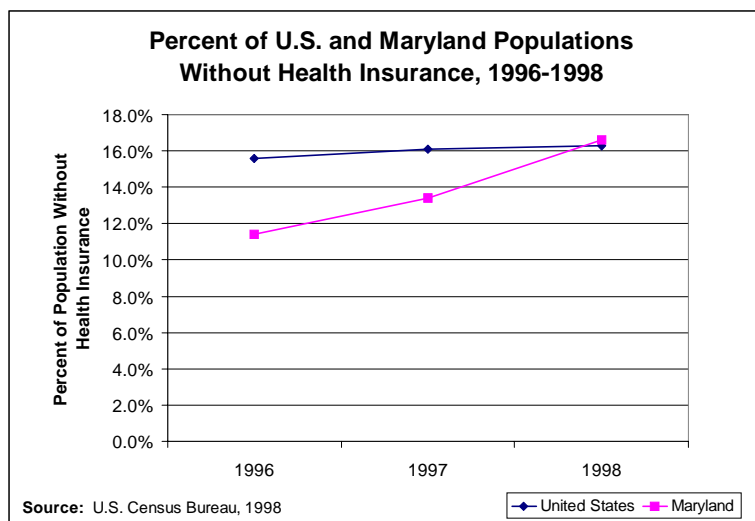
ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

The Issue

Available evidence suggests that there are a variety of barriers to obtaining needed health care around the State. Accurate and timely monitoring of the dimensions of these problems is critical for development of appropriate solutions.

Access to health care, defined by the Institute of Medicine as “the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best possible health outcomes,” is a national, state and local problem. It has been a focus of debate and discussion in many forums of both public and private sectors, and will most likely continue until access to health care improves. Lack of health insurance coverage may be the strongest indicator of inferior access to health care. In Maryland, three year averages of the Current Population Survey estimate that the number of uninsured has remained fairly constant, at approximately 700,000 residents, or nearly one in seven Marylanders (*Current Population Survey*, March 1999). In Maryland, minorities are twice as likely to be uninsured as white, non-Hispanic residents. Additionally, more than half of all adults in Maryland who are uninsured are between the ages of 18 and 34. Due to the increasing costs of health insurance, many of the uninsured include low-income, employed persons.

Most initiatives to improve access focus on providing health care to those who cannot afford health insurance. However, two other factors, the availability of services, and cultural and social barriers, also produce consequences which impact access to health care statewide and at the local level. Around the State, there exist many pockets of underserved populations who lack access to “willing providers,” for needed primary, as well as various speciality care services.



Altogether, available information indicates that Maryland has a number of access issues. However, it is very difficult to demonstrate through the maze of available data, from both public and private sources, exactly what the most important access issues are and how the impact of these

issues vary in each local community. Accounting for the magnitude and distribution of these problems around the state should be the first step in crafting solutions to improve access on a statewide level.

Topics, by jurisdiction, included in the Health Improvement Plan

Statewide - *Increase Access to Necessary Health Care Services*

Allegany County - *Promoting Access to Health Care for the Uninsured*

Anne Arundel County - *Access to Health Care for the Uninsured*

Baltimore County - *Increasing Access to Care by Eliminating Barriers in Baltimore County*

Carroll County - *Assuring Access to Quality Health Services*

Baltimore City - *Access to Health Care*

Priority focus in other jurisdictions

Access to Health Care is also identified as a priority area for FY2000 in:

Dorchester County • Frederick County • Harford County • Montgomery County

Prince George's County • Washington County • Wicomico County • Worcester County

Highlights of HIP strategies recommended to improve access to health care:

(for in-depth details, see the complete text of each state and county module in the HIP)

- Develop a method to accurately assess the health care needs of residents of Maryland at the state and local levels. (**State, Baltimore City, Anne Arundel and Carroll** counties)
- Assure access to health care/insurance coverage for residents (**Allegany County**), those with low income (**Anne Arundel County**), and children (**Baltimore County**).
- Develop a strategic plan to improve access to health care. (**State**)
- Establish a single point of contact for the uninsured in need of medical and pharmacological care. (**Allegany County**)
- Develop a network of health care providers who agree to provide services to eligible patients at reduced fees. (**Anne Arundel County**)
- Develop a method to ensure that county residents have reasonable transportation to and from medical appointments. (**Baltimore County**)
- Identify gaps in services and establish strategies to overcome barriers and unmet needs. (**Carroll County**)
- Expand support and outreach services. (**Baltimore City**)

Statewide Partners

Maryland Community and Public Health Administration, DHMH • Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) • Maryland Health Care Commission • Maryland Local Health Departments • Maryland Medical Care Program, DHMH • Office of Health Policy, DHMH • Office of Primary Care Services, DHMH • Office of Public Health Assessment, DHMH